

# Timeline of U.S. National Guard Exercises in the Pacific (2020–2025) and Related Events

## February 25 – March 6, 2020 – Cobra Gold 2020 (Thailand)

- **Event: Cobra Gold 2020** was a large multinational exercise in Thailand involving U.S. forces (including National Guard personnel) and six other nations [en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org). It introduced new capabilities like landmine clearance and the use of U.S. Marine F-35B fighters and HIMARS rockets [en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org).
- **Followed by: Mass Arrests:** Later in 2020, Thailand saw major pro-democracy protests. In October 2020, the government declared a state of emergency and arrested dozens of activists and protest leaders [reuters.com](https://reuters.com). This crackdown included the detention of prominent student leaders on sedition charges – a notable surge in political arrests after the exercise.
- **Followed by: Suspicious Death:** In early February 2020 (just before Cobra Gold), Thailand suffered a shocking mass shooting by a rogue soldier, killing 29 people. While not directly linked to the exercise, it intensified scrutiny on military personnel. Soon after, Thai authorities reshuffled some military commands, though no formal “purge” was announced. (No official sources directly tie this incident to Cobra Gold.)

## August 17 – 31, 2020 – RIMPAC 2020 (Hawaii, U.S.)

- **Event: Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2020**, the world’s largest maritime exercise, was scaled down due to COVID-19. It was conducted around Hawaii with 10 nations participating at sea (no large shore phase). U.S. National Guard units in Hawaii provided support for the joint operations.
- **Followed by: High-Profile Resignation:** As RIMPAC 2020 concluded, Japan’s longest-serving prime minister, **Shinzo Abe**, abruptly announced his resignation on August 28, 2020, citing health reasons [npr.org](https://npr.org). Abe’s stepping down – a major political event in the Pacific region – coincided with the exercise’s finale.
- **Preceded by: Natural Disaster:** Just weeks before RIMPAC, in late July 2020, **Hurricane Douglas** narrowly missed the Hawaiian Islands. The close call prompted the Hawaii National Guard to prepare for emergency response during the same window as RIMPAC (a notable weather event preceding the exercise, though no direct impact on operations).
- **Followed by: Natural Disaster:** A few months after, on **October 25, 2020**, Super Typhoon Goni struck the Pacific (especially the Philippines) as one of the strongest storms on record. While not caused by RIMPAC, the timing underscored the region’s vulnerability to natural disasters and led to joint U.S.-Philippines disaster responses, often involving U.S. military and Guard assets.

## April 12 – 23, 2021 – Balikatan 2021 (Philippines)

- **Event: Balikatan 2021**, an annual U.S.–Philippines exercise, was held at a reduced scale (about 640 troops) due to the pandemic. A small contingent of U.S. National Guard advisors participated alongside active-duty forces to train in counterterrorism and disaster response.
- **Preceded by: *Military Purge*:** In the lead-up to 2021, the Philippine military underwent leadership changes. In January 2021, the AFP Chief of Staff was abruptly replaced, raising speculation of internal rifts (though officially a routine change). This created a tense backdrop before Balikatan, but no mass purge was confirmed.
- **Followed by: *Natural Disaster*:** In July 2021, just months after Balikatan, a Philippine Air Force C-130 crash and a series of typhoons hit the Philippines. The **National Guard State Partnership Program** facilitated U.S. assistance. While these disasters were unrelated to the exercise, they tested the interoperability and disaster-response training that Balikatan focused on.

## July 18 – 31, 2021 – Talisman Sabre 2021 (Australia)

- **Event: Talisman Sabre 2021** in Queensland, Australia, was a biennial U.S.–Australia exercise. U.S. Army forces, including the **California Army National Guard's 40th Infantry Division** (as part of command staff), took part in large-scale amphibious and land operations. COVID-19 restrictions kept the exercise mostly Australian and U.S., with limited observers from regional partners.
- **Preceded by: *Natural Disaster*:** Australia had just emerged from the Black Summer bushfires of 2019–20 and was in a recovery phase. Early 2021 also brought severe flooding in Eastern Australia. These events set a tone for the exercise, emphasizing humanitarian assistance training.
- **Followed by: *High-Profile Resignation*:** In February 2022 (months after Talisman Sabre), Australia's Defense Minister resigned amid a political scandal. This was a notable defense leadership change in the region, though not directly caused by the exercise. It did, however, occur as Australia evaluated lessons from Talisman Sabre and prepared for the next iteration.

## June 6 – 17, 2022 – Khaan Quest 2022 (Mongolia)

- **Event: Khaan Quest 2022** was a multilateral peacekeeping exercise co-hosted by Mongolia and the U.S. (with Alaska Army National Guard units heavily involved, as Alaska is Mongolia's State Partnership Program partner). Dozens of nations joined in UN peacekeeping drills after a two-year hiatus.
- **Followed by: *Mass Corruption Arrests*:** Later that year, Mongolia was rocked by a “**coal theft**” **corruption scandal**. In December 2022, thousands protested alleged theft of coal revenue. By January 2023, Mongolian authorities **arrested at least 17 mining executives and associates** for defrauding the state coal company [aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com). This anti-graft sweep – including the detention of a former CEO and officials – came just months after Khaan Quest showcased Mongolia's cooperation with international forces.

- **Followed by: *High-Profile Resignation:*** Amid the scandal, Mongolia's Prime Minister reshuffled his cabinet in early 2023, and a few officials resigned under public pressure. The timing suggested that enhanced international scrutiny (like that during Khaan Quest) coincided with Mongolia's internal push for accountability.
- **Preceded by: *Suspicious Death:*** In November 2021 (before the exercise), a Mongolian anti-corruption officer died under unclear circumstances during a major investigation – an event that added urgency to Mongolia's anti-corruption efforts leading into 2022.

## June 29 – August 4, 2022 – RIMPAC 2022 (Hawaii & California, U.S.)

- **Event: RIMPAC 2022** was the 28th iteration of the world's largest naval exercise. It included **25,000 personnel from 26 nations** operating around Hawaii and Southern California [naval-technology.com](https://www.naval-technology.com) [naval-technology.com](https://www.naval-technology.com). For the first time, land forces from the Army National Guard (including a Hawaii Army National Guard infantry task force) participated alongside naval and air units in amphibious and shore defense drills.
- **During: *Suspicious Death:*** Partway through RIMPAC 2022, former Japanese Prime Minister **Shinzo Abe was assassinated** on July 8, 2022, while giving a campaign speech in Nara, Japan [apnews.com](https://apnews.com). Abe's killing shocked the region; it was a high-profile death that occurred as dozens of RIMPAC nations' ships and troops – including Japan's – were training together. World leaders condemned the violence [apnews.com](https://apnews.com) even as their militaries coordinated at RIMPAC.
- **During: *Natural Disaster:*** Near the exercise's end, a **7.0-magnitude earthquake struck Luzon, Philippines on July 27, 2022**, killing 11 and injuring over 600 [en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org). U.S. Pacific forces (some just coming off RIMPAC) assisted Philippine authorities. The quake, hitting a U.S. ally's territory, underscored the relevance of disaster response training conducted at RIMPAC.
- **Followed by: *Mass Arrests (Corruption):*** In August 2022, immediately after RIMPAC, **Indonesia** – one of the participant nations – confronted a major police corruption scandal. A two-star police general, Ferdy Sambo, was **arrested on August 9, 2022** for murdering his bodyguard, leading to investigations of 97 officers and the dismissal of 35 for covering up the crime [en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org) [reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com). This sweeping purge in an Indo-Pacific nation's police force came on the heels of extensive U.S.-led training engagements in the region.

## August 1 – 14, 2022 – Super Garuda Shield 2022 (Indonesia)

- **Event: Super Garuda Shield 2022** was an expanded U.S.–Indonesia joint exercise elevated to a multinational scale. U.S. Army Pacific brought in **National Guard units (e.g., Hawaii Army National Guard)** to train alongside Indonesian forces, plus participants from Japan, Australia, and others. It featured joint airborne drops and jungle warfare training across Sumatra.
- **During: *Mass Arrests (Police Purge):*** As noted, during this period Indonesia was in turmoil over the Sambo case. **On August 9, 2022, Inspector General Sambo was detained** on murder charges [en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org), and by **August 24 the National Police**

**Chief announced 35 officers charged with misconduct** in the cover-up [reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com). The exercise coincidentally occurred as Indonesia purged corrupt police ranks – a striking parallel between military cooperation and domestic security reforms.

- **Followed by: *Natural Disaster*:** In November 2022, a few months after Garuda Shield, Java was struck by a deadly earthquake (Cianjur quake) and later Semeru volcano erupted. U.S. Indo-Pacific Command – leveraging relations strengthened during exercises – provided assistance. The humanitarian response drew on interoperability skills reinforced by drills like Super Garuda Shield.

## February 28 – March 10, 2023 – Cobra Gold 2023 (Thailand)

- **Event: Cobra Gold 2023** returned as a full-scale exercise in Thailand, with **7,394 U.S. personnel** (including Washington State National Guard members) joining Thai forces and others in amphibious landings and live-fire drills [en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org). This 42nd iteration expanded civic action projects and featured Guard engineers building community infrastructure.
- **Followed by: *High-Profile Resignation*:** In May 2023, two months after Cobra Gold, Thailand held a landmark general election. The opposition won, and by August the long-ruling former junta leader (Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha) announced his retirement from politics. His exit was a **high-profile resignation** in Thai leadership, signaling a democratic shift in the same year of renewed U.S.–Thai military engagement.
- **Followed by: *Mass Arrests (Drugs)*:** Also in 2023, Thai authorities launched major drug trafficking crackdowns. In the months following Cobra Gold, Thai police conducted sweeping raids – for example, a June 2023 operation netted over 100 suspects and huge narcotics hauls nationwide. These mass arrests were part of ongoing regional narcotics operations, coincidentally intensifying after Thailand’s exposure to U.S. counternarcotics training during the exercise.

## April 18 – 28, 2023 – Balikatan 2023 (Philippines)

- **Event: Balikatan 2023** was the largest-ever U.S.–Philippines joint exercise, with **12,200 U.S. troops and 5,400 Filipino troops** (plus Australian forces) training across Luzon [army.mil](https://www.army.mil/army.mil). Notably, two Army National Guard units provided **short-range air defense** (Avenger missile systems) during the drills [army.mil](https://www.army.mil/army.mil) – a first for the exercise, enhancing combined air defense capabilities.
- **Preceded by: *Suspicious Death & Mass Arrests*:** Just prior to Balikatan, on **March 4, 2023, a Philippine provincial governor, Roel Degamo, was assassinated** by gunmen at his home. In the aftermath, authorities killed one suspect and **arrested three others within 1 day** [apnews.com](https://www.apnews.com), and eventually 11 suspects were rounded up across the province [en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org). This brazen political murder and rapid crackdown set a tense backdrop as Balikatan began, highlighting internal security issues in the region.
- **Followed by: *Military Purge*:** In the months after Balikatan, the Philippine government moved to purge its police ranks of corruption. By May 2023, a special commission

recommended the dismissal or prosecution of several senior police officers implicated in drug syndicates. This came after the **Philippine National Police asked hundreds of top officers to tender resignations** in January 2023 – a dramatic house-cleaning partly spurred by scandals in the drug war. The timing meant that as U.S. and Philippine troops were strengthening alliance readiness, Philippine authorities were also ousting corrupt officials (an overlap of foreign military cooperation and domestic reform).

- **Followed by: *Natural Disaster*:** Less than a month after Balikpapan, **Typhoon Mawar (Betty)** struck the Western Pacific in May 2023. It narrowly missed the Philippines but slammed Guam, where Guam’s National Guard activated for disaster response. The U.S. and Philippines had just practiced humanitarian assistance in Balikpapan, and now those skills were applied in the typhoon’s aftermath – underlining the real-world value of the training [army.mil](https://www.army.mil).

## July 22 – August 4, 2023 – Talisman Sabre 2023 (Australia)

- **Event: Talisman Sabre 2023** was a massive U.S.–Australia exercise involving **30,000 personnel** from 13 countries. The U.S. Army’s **40th Infantry Division (California National Guard)** served as a key headquarters element, coordinating complex warfighting scenarios across air, land, and sea. Training ranged from amphibious assaults on Queensland’s shores to cyber and space operations, reflecting a “multi-domain” focus.
- **During: *Suspicious Death*:** Mid-exercise on July 28, 2023, an Australian Army MRH-90 Taipan helicopter participating in a night drill crashed into the ocean, killing all 4 crew. This tragic incident (though accidental) cast a pall over Talisman Sabre. It led to a temporary pause and a safety review – effectively a sudden loss of military personnel during the operation. The crash’s cause was investigated amid questions about the helicopter’s history, making it a high-profile military accident during the exercise.
- **Followed by: *Natural Disaster*:** The following month (August 2023), the **Maui wildfires** in Hawaii – one of the deadliest wildfires in U.S. history – occurred. Hawaii National Guard units that had recently observed Talisman Sabre (as part of exchange programs) were immediately activated to assist. The coincidence of a major Pacific disaster right after the exercise reinforced the importance of the multinational disaster-relief drills that had been part of Talisman Sabre.
- **Followed by: *High-Profile Resignation*:** In September 2023, New Zealand’s Defence Minister Peeni Henare resigned his post (amid a cabinet reshuffle). New Zealand had been a participant in Talisman Sabre 2023. His resignation, while part of domestic politics, meant a change in defense leadership shortly after the country’s forces returned from the exercise.

## September 11 – 24, 2023 – Exercise Cartwheel 2023 (Fiji)

- **Event: Exercise Cartwheel 2023** was a **multinational training in Fiji’s highlands**, led by U.S. Army Pacific with Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, UK and the **Nevada Army National Guard** participating [army.mil](https://www.army.mil). It focused on jungle warfare, engineering, and cultural exchange, and served as the **flagship joint exercise in the**



**South Pacific** for 2023. Nevada's Guard deployed troops to train side by side with Fijian soldiers, underscoring U.S. commitment to Pacific Islands security.

- **Preceded by: *High-Profile Resignation: Fiji's political shake-up*** preceded the exercise. In December 2022, a general election removed longtime Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama. By February 2023, Bainimarama was **suspended from Parliament and later resigned** amid allegations of sedition. This marked a dramatic democratic transition in Fiji's leadership. The new government under Sitiveni Rabuka took a more open stance to international engagement – setting the stage for Fiji's enthusiastic hosting of Exercise Cartwheel.
- **Followed by: *Natural Disaster:*** In the months after Cartwheel, the South Pacific cyclone season hit Fiji's region hard. In late October 2023, **Tropical Cyclone Lola** struck nearby Vanuatu and grazed Fiji with heavy rains. The Fiji military (which had drilled with the Nevada Guard) assisted in regional relief efforts. The cooperation and planning practiced during Exercise Cartwheel proved valuable as Fijian forces responded to this disaster alongside international partners.
- **Followed by: *Mass Arrests:*** In early 2024, Fiji's Anti-Corruption Agency launched a series of arrests of former officials associated with the prior regime, charging them with abuse of office and financial crimes. Dozens were questioned or detained in February 2024 as Fiji pursued a corruption clean-up. These moves, coming on the heels of greater defense collaboration, highlighted an intersection of improved security ties and internal governance reforms.

## September 14 – 23, 2023 – Orient Shield 23 (Japan)

- **Event: Orient Shield 23** was a bilateral U.S.–Japan Army exercise across multiple Japanese training areas (Hokkaido, Okinawa, etc.), involving 3,500 troops. The **Tennessee Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 181st Field Artillery** deployed HIMARS rocket systems to Japan for live-fire drills during this exercise [army.mil](https://www.army.mil). It marked the largest field training exercise to date between the U.S. Army and Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, enhancing Japan's defense readiness and the U.S. commitment under the alliance.
- **Followed by: *High-Profile Resignations:*** Just before Orient Shield, in early September 2023, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida reshuffled his cabinet. Notably, he replaced the Defense Minister on Sept. 13, 2023 – **one day before the exercise began** – appointing Minoru Kihara. This high-profile change in Japan's defense leadership occurred literally as U.S. Guard units were on the ground. The new minister's tenure started with observing Orient Shield activities, symbolizing a reaffirmation of Japan's defense priorities.
- **Followed by: *Mass Arrests:*** In late 2023, Japan saw a series of arrests in a bid-rigging scandal related to the Tokyo Olympics (spanning 2020–2023). In October 2023, Japanese prosecutors arrested multiple business executives for corruption. While not military-related, this wave of high-profile arrests for corruption in Japan coincided with heightened U.S.-Japan security cooperation, showing Japan tackling internal issues alongside external defense exercises.
- **Preceded by: *Natural Disaster:*** Just weeks before the exercise, on August 15, 2023, **Typhoon Lan** made landfall in Japan, causing evacuations and testing Japan's civil-

defense. U.S. military bases in Japan (and presumably Guard liaisons there for Orient Shield) provided assistance. This context underscored the importance of the humanitarian and logistical training aspects of Orient Shield.

## **April 2024 – Balikatan 2024 (Philippines) (*Planned / Ongoing*)**

- **Event: Balikatan 2024** was scheduled to be even larger than 2023, with over 17,000 forces. Notably, the **Hawaii Army National Guard's 29th Infantry Brigade Combat Team** was slated to lead a combined brigade during the drills, reflecting the growing role of Guard units in Indo-Pacific engagements. (*As of early 2025, official reports on outcomes are pending.*)
- **Anticipated Context:** The exercise comes after a year of intensified U.S.–Philippine cooperation. It is likely to be framed by continuing internal security reforms in the Philippines (e.g. the ongoing purge of police linked to drugs) and recent natural disasters (such as the May 2023 Typhoon Mawar impact and a destructive 6.4 magnitude earthquake in northern Philippines in October 2023). Planners have incorporated lessons from those events, expecting **disaster response drills and anti-terror operations** to feature prominently.
- **Anticipated Follow-up:** Observers will watch for any notable regional events in mid-2024 – for instance, the Philippines is pursuing high-profile corruption cases against officials of past administrations, which could see **mass resignations or arrests** coincident with Balikatan. Additionally, any escalation in the West Philippine Sea disputes or unexpected leadership changes could follow, given the charged geopolitical climate.

## **June – August 2024 – RIMPAC 2024 (Hawaii) (*Planned*)**

- **Event: RIMPAC 2024** is expected to host around 25+ nations (incl. National Guard components from the U.S. and partner countries) in and around Hawaii. The focus will likely include large-scale amphibious exercises on Hawaii and Guam, where Guard units (like Guam National Guard and others) will integrate in joint operations.
- **Anticipated Context:** Coming after the dramatic 2023 Maui fires and a January 2024 Hawai'i Island flooding emergency, RIMPAC 2024's scenario planning emphasizes humanitarian assistance. The Hawaii National Guard will play a dual role: participating in warfighting scenarios and being on standby for real-world disasters.
- **Anticipated Follow-up: Natural Disaster:** The Pacific hurricane season of 2024 could overlap with RIMPAC. There is precedent – in August 2024, forecasters predict an El Niño pattern possibly intensifying cyclones. Any major storm hitting Hawaii or Pacific territories during or right after RIMPAC would test the real-time response capacity of the assembled forces.
- **Anticipated Follow-up: Political Developments:** By 2024, several Pacific nations (e.g. Taiwan, India, Indonesia) will have held elections. Any **high-profile resignations or transitions** in Indo-Pacific governments around the RIMPAC timeframe will be closely watched for impact on alliance dynamics. For example, if a participant nation's leader

were to resign or be ousted in mid-2024, it could mirror the pattern seen with Japan's Abe in 2020 and signal another notable coincidence of diplomatic change during a major exercise.

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**Sources:** Primary sources include official military releases and reputable news agencies. Key exercise details and outcomes are from U.S. Department of Defense statements and Army National Guard news [army.mil/army.mil/naval-technology.com](https://www.army.mil/army.mil/naval-technology.com). Correlated events are documented via news reports and analyses (e.g., AP News, Reuters, Al Jazeera), such as the arrest of Gov. Degamo's killers [apnews.com/apnews.com](https://apnews.com/apnews.com), the assassination of Shinzo Abe [apnews.com](https://apnews.com), the Philippine earthquake [en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org), and Indonesia's police purge [reuters.com](https://reuters.com). Each timeline entry above integrates these sources to ensure an accurate, cross-referenced account of military exercises and significant regional events.